DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 024 963 CG 002 956

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The Elementary School Counselor: A Man of Action.

University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls.
Spons Agency- Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
Pub Date [Mar 68]
Note- 7p.; Presented at A Workshop for Elementary School Administrators, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, March, April, 1968.
EDRS Price MF- $0.25 HC- $0.45
Descriptors- Childhood Attitudes, Childhood Needs, *Counseling Services, *Counselor Functions, *Elementary School Counseling, *Elementary School Counselors, Guidance Personnel

The elementary school counselor, a newly-emerged member of the pupil personnel term, is a specialist whose skills are directed toward helping children develop in a healthy, normal way. His skills should allow him to understand the concerns children have, the meanings and goals of their behavior, and the psychological systems which affect their lives. His training should aid him in communicating his acceptance and his interest in each child. Academic preparation should include specialized courses in counseling and in psychology. Research supports the counseling function as one of the primary duties of the elementary school counselor. Although the bulk of his time is spent working with children, consulting with teachers, parents, and administrators is also an integral part of the counselor's functions. He works primarily with children who have normal concerns which may affect their academic, social, or personal development, rather than with children in crisis situations. (KP)

Presented during A Workshop for Elementary School Administrators
On The
Utilization of the Elementary School Counselor* - March, April, 1968
University of Northern Iowa

THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELOR: A MAN OF ACTION

ED024963

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As educators, we have prided ourselves on our communities' schools. As educated people we recognize that there are, existing in the physiological and psychological structures of our society, various pressures which affect the child and teacher within our schools. These stresses and pressures are produced, in part, by a world where technology and scientific advances occur at a faster rate than that which man can comprehend. A world where social changes are of such magnitude that many do not want to comprehend. In this life situation we find the elementary school child facing stresses and pressures which did not exist for us, but which now are of major concern to us as educators.

The stresses and pressures which children face tend, at the most, to incapacitate and interfere with their attempts to master their educational opportunities and to make reasonable social adjustments. At the least, these pressures affect children so that they are realistically concerned about life and death, war, the atomic holocaust, separation from family, unemployment of Dad, fear of failing, and the fear of not being accepted or wanted by people they wish to call friends.

While most elementary grade children spend at least one-third of their day in school; and their teacher is recognized as the next most impor-

*This program is funded in part
through a grant from
IOWA COMMUNITY SERVICES
under
Title I of the Higher Education Act
of
1965

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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tant adult in their life after their parents, I have yet to find a teacher who has the time or freedom to be with the child when the child needs him. Academic instruction may be individualized, but this is usually as far as it goes. This is not, in most cases, by the teacher's choosing, but rather due to the instructional demands of the institution.

It is essential that somewhere in our elementary schools we make arrangements to have a person who does have time to spend with children when they need it. We need to acknowledge the existence of these discordances and take steps to counteract their deleterious effects. To assist the elementary school in reaching this goal we find the emergence of a new member of the pupil personnel team - the elementary school counselor.

The elementary school counselor is a pupil personnel specialist whose training has been directed toward developing skills which will allow him to assist children in their desire to grow and develop in a healthy, normal way. The elementary school counselor's skills are ones which should allow him: to understand the concerns and worries children have; to understand the meanings, purposes, and goals of their behavior; and to understand the psychological systems which affect their lives. The counselor's training should aid him to communicate to children that he is an adult who is really interested in them. An adult who not only has time to listen and assist them in talking about their feelings but also the time and interest to help them in planning for changes they wish to make. An adult who will accept them, no matter how terrible or worthless they think they may be. An adult who cares.

What type of academic training should this person have? Research by Mendelson (1967) identified what practicing elementary school counselors and elementary school administrators considered to be necessary academic preparation for the elementary school counselor. Courses such as: educational psychology, child psychology, group and individual counseling with children, use of play media, personality theory, and practicum in working with parents and teachers were mentioned most often.

When the counselors of the above study were asked to identify course work they felt had been most helpful to them as counselors, they listed the following: educational psychology, child psychology and development, analysis of the individual, counseling practicum and principles of elementary school guidance.

When the counselors were asked to identify courses they wish they had had or would still like to have, they mentioned: advanced child psychology and development, analysis and adjustment of the individual, psychology of the exceptional child, abnormal psychology, learning theory, counseling practicum with elementary school children and parents, group counseling, and the use of play media. These counselors were asking for further assistance in developing skills which would allow them: to understand how children develop; to understand the psychological and physiological causes of child behavior; to develop individual and group counseling skills; to strengthen their knowledge in educational psychology, learning theory, and personality theory.

The above research also identified functions successful practicing elementary school counselors were actually performing in their school setting. The principals and counselors of the study identified elementary school counselors as spending the greatest amount of their time performing the following tasks:

1. Doing individual counseling with children who were referred by their parents or teachers.

2. Consulting with teachers concerning pupils with whom they wanted assistance.

3. Arranging parent conferences to discuss family situations which might be affecting the child's school adjustment.

4. Conducting group counseling with students having learning and/or social problems.

5. Conducting interviews with pupils, teachers, administrators, and parents as a means of collecting information pertinent to making valid assessments of a child's developmental history.

6. Doing individual counseling with children who seek help on their own.

7. Conducting parent conferences to discuss the academic progress of their children.

8. Conferring with teachers on problems of motivating students in learning.

9. Identifying and counseling under-achieving pupils.

The functions identified by the elementary school counselors as requiring the least amount of their time were:

1. Assisting school personnel in selecting, revising, and improving the group testing program.

2. Interpreting to teachers the functions of other pupil personnel specialists in the school district.

3. Interpreting ability test results to individual parents.

4. Assisting teachers in decision-making with such problems as grouping and retention.

5. Cooperating with PTAs, YMCAs, church groups, and special school classes in giving talks on such topics as family relations, boy-girl problems, and similar issues.

6. Administering school group ability tests.

7. Assisting teachers in setting up remedial learning groups.

8. Counseling teachers concerning their own personal problems.

9. Counseling parents concerning their own personal problems.

10. Holding staff meetings to acquaint teachers with referral procedures.

The finding from the above-mentioned research (as well as those that follow) clearly support the counseling function as one of the primary duties performed by the elementary school counselor. Research by Smith and Eckerson (1965) found that 77% of the principals reported that their CDC's (child development consultants) spent the greatest amount of time working with children rather than parents or teachers; McCreary and Miller's (1966) study done in California, found that the counselor spent 50% of the time working with pupils, 17% working with teachers, 10% working with administrators and 12% with parents. McDougal and Reitan's (1963) study with elementary school principals from the states of Washington, Oregon and Idaho, found that coun-

selors' functions considered very important by a majority of principals were: counseling students with personal and emotional problems, consulting with parents concerned with their children's problems and counseling students with academic and educational problems.

Consulting with teachers, parents, or administrators is also an integral part of the counselor's over-all functions. The elementary school counselor works closely with teachers; by recognizing that their knowledge of the child is invaluable; by handling referrals; and by assisting the teachers in understanding the purpose of students' classroom behavior and the effects different classroom atmospheres have on children. The counselor also works with parents, when they request it, assisting them in understanding the possible effects home environment may have on the child's present behavior. The counselor also may suggest to parents alternate ways of acting and reacting toward the child and assist them in practicing better mental health at home.

There is little doubt that when the counselor is able to assist teachers to develop and maintain a transactional view toward child behavior and assist them in understanding the purposes of behavior, the children and hers, he is helping to make the classroom a better source for positive learning. The counselor may use role-playing sessions, incomplete stories, and in-class group demonstrations to assist the teacher to gain meaning from his consulting.

Where the counselor consults with parents he should be aware that his acceptance as an individual who can help, is based on his school performance. The role of consultant to parents may present a dilemma to some counselors and administrators since this is not a function which has usually been seen as appropriate for secondary school counselors. It is appropriate for the elementary school counselor to offer parents information which may help them to understand reasons children behave the way they do. The counselor must put his knowledge to work either through counseling or consulting. Offering concrete tangibles to concerned parents or teachers who do not know

what to do is within the realm of the qualified elementary school counselor.

The counselor may also consult with his principal when requested. Whether regarding student referrals, classroom problems with children, curriculum planning or program development, the counselor should be available to the principal. Available not as a judge, evaluator, or final voice; but rather as a sounding board, against which ideas may be tested.

Thus, this person called "counselor" should be a highly skilled individual who has had training and practice in understanding and working with most psycho-educational problems and concerns of children. The elementary school counselor is an individual who can understand the fears, worries, and concerns that children have. An adult who will accept them and trust them to make their own choices and their own decisions. An adult in what may appear to a child as a cruel - harsh world who really cares and is interested in them.

Then what might you, as administrators, expect from the elementary school counselor? You should expect him to counsel with children; to assist teachers in furthering children's social, emotional, and intellectual growth and development; to identify and attempt to remove learning blocks which are psychologically or intellectually based; to make use of specialists such as reading teachers, speech therapists, and school psychologists; and to be prepared to make student referrals to other agencies. The main tools of the counselor will be individual and group counseling; psychological system analysis; and consulting with teachers, parents, and administrators.

The elementary school counselor must work with all children, but should direct the major proportion of his time toward counseling with children who have normal concerns and worries that may interfere and affect their academic, social, or personal development. It is not suggested the counselor should exclude the problem or crisis-oriented student. All children must have access to the counselor if we hope to take positive steps to reduce school adjustment

problems. What is suggested is a greater proportion of his time be directed toward assisting non-problem children to develop and reach their maximum potential.

You may wonder what normal children talk to a counselor about. Topics such as: I can't learn to read; I am not as smart as people think I am; I am not pretty; My teachers don't like me: I am fat; I have no friends; My little brother messes up my homework; I am different; My puppy was killed; Mommy is sick; Mommy and Daddy fight and argue; Grandma is dead.

It is essential that counselors be permitted to perform their main function of working with children. School administrators must not permit a dilution of the counselor's effectiveness by forcing him to make secondary functions main ones. The view that children cannot be helped without first altering their environment is fallacious and narrow. To be effective and to assist children to help themselves, the counselor must be with them and be aware of the psychological systems which affect them.

Children have the courage and ability to reach their goals. They need at least one adult who has the time and desire, and is willing and able to help them take the first steps. The counselor is, and must be, indeed a "Man of Action."